

**ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT**  
**Case File No.: AA-008329**  
**AK-040-02-EA-026**

Applicant: Anchorage Water & Wastewater Utility  
3000 Arctic Boulevard  
Anchorage, Alaska 99503

Type of Action: Recreation and Public Purposes Act Lease, 43 CFR 2912

Location: Seward Meridian, T. 14 N., R. 2 W., Section 11, NW¼

Prepared By: Rodney Huffman, Realty Specialist

Preparing Office: Bureau of Land Management  
Anchorage Field Office  
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Date: November 18, 2002

I. INTRODUCTION:

A. Background:

In August 1977, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) issued a renewable lease for a period of twenty-five years, to the Municipality of Anchorage for the Eagle River Sanitary Sewerage Project Treatment Facility. The facility has been renamed the Eagle River Wastewater Treatment Facility (ERWTF) and is now operated by the Anchorage Water and Wastewater Utility (AWWU).

BLM issued the lease for two parcels of land. See the attached Initial Map, dated June 28, 2002, which shows an aerial view of the site with an outline of the past lease area. Parcel #1, described as the Eagle River Lagoon Site, encompassed 69.99 acres and is where AWWU located all the core facilities it needs to process raw sewage. For security reasons, AWWU has installed fences on many portions of the old lease area. Parcel # 2 described as a 30 foot Sewer Easement included a strip of land 30 feet in width and 1,095 feet in length, that totaled about .75 acres. Within the old easement AWWU maintains a 24-inch diameter sewer pipeline, which transports the raw sewage to the treatment facility. At the time of issuance, operators of the facility considered this acreage sufficient to meet current and future needs for expansion, which would be required as Chugiak and Eagle River grew in population.

Between 1989 and 1992, AWWU expanded and remodeled the treatment facility, installing new equipment, which changed how AWWU processed the sewage. The result is that less acreage is now needed to accommodate the facilities that process the sewage. Under the application submitted by AWWU for renewing the lease, Parcel #1 has decreased in size by 63 percent, to approximately 27 acres. Parcel #2 remains the same.

The ERWTF provides advanced wastewater treatment processing for about 1.4 million gallons of wastewater per day, which equates into about the same amount of treated water being discharged into the Eagle River on a daily basis. The discharged water is most often at a 99 percent removal rate for biochemical oxygen demand and suspended solids; these removal rates meet and/or exceed federal and state regulations. One million, four hundred thousand gallons of wastewater is about 56 percent of the design capacity for the facility. The sub processes include: screening, grit removal, primary sedimentation, activated sludge, secondary sedimentation, filtration, disinfection and dechlorination. The solids handling process includes gravity thickening and storage. Thickened sludge is transported by truck and pipeline to a facility in Anchorage for ultimate disposal. All processes except for chlorination and sulfonation are housed inside existing structures.

The Corps of Engineers will need to issue a letter of non-objection on behalf of the Real Property Division of the Directorate of Public Works (DPW) on Fort

Richardson, prior to BLM issuing a lease. If issued, the proposed lease would have a term of twenty-five years and could be renewed.

B. Purpose and Need for the Proposed Action:

The AWWU has applied to renew its lease for the parcels where the ERWTF and sewer line are located. Since several million dollars have been spent to build and maintain this facility, AWWU would like to have the lease renewed for another 25-year period. The need for treatment of wastewater is expected to increase as the populations of Eagle River and Chugiak expand in the future.

C. Conformance with Land Use Plan:

The Proposed Action has been reviewed and found to be in compliance with the Southcentral Management Framework Plan (MFP), March 1980. Objective Number L-1 of the MFP states the BLM intends to "Satisfy state and local government needs as well as public and/or private demonstrated needs for land as they arise."

Additionally, this environmental analysis assesses the impacts of the Proposed Action and provides a basis for a decision on the proposal (43 CFR §1610.8(b)(1)).

D. Relationship to Statutes, Regulations, Policy, Plans and Other Environmental Analyses:

The authority to issue the lease is the Recreation and Public Purposes (R&PP) Act of 1926. Under the R&PP Act, sewage treatment plants are specifically provided for because they provide a public health-related benefit.

II. PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVE

A. Proposed Action:

The Proposed Action is for AWWU to continue the operation and maintenance of the ERWTF. The facility is located immediately west of the community of Eagle River, on land withdrawn for the Fort Richardson Military Reservation. The facility is located in the NW¼ of Section 11, T. 14 N., R. 2 W., Seward Meridian. The ERWTF provides sewage treatment for the communities of Eagle River and Chugiak. The application from AWWU identifies two parcels that are needed for the successful operation of the treatment plant.

Parcel #1 is approximately 27 acres in size and is the current location of the core facilities for processing sewage. For security purposes AWWU has installed fencing around the entire site. Currently, AWWU has four buildings within the leasehold area.

- Building one (the administrative building) measures 250' x 101' and holds offices, a small conference room, solids handling, primary clarifiers, and a preliminary treatment area. On the lower level of building one is a maintenance shop and an equipment bay.

- Building two measures 194' x 101' and holds secondary clarifiers, a return activated sludge room, and a filter.
- The third building measures 184' x 77' and holds the aeration basins.
- The fourth building measures approximately 40' x 20' and is used as a storage building.
- Chlorination and sulfonation take place in a basin measuring 29' x 70', located just east of building two.

In the future, AWWU hopes to expand the facility to include a head works improvement area, a UV disinfection facility, and duplication of the facilities housed in buildings two and three. The structures currently identified for future expansion can be accommodated within the proposed leasehold. For a visual representation of the final proposal for the lease boundary see the attachment, entitled Map and Preliminary Metes and Bounds Description, dated October 7, 2002.

Parcel # 2 is described as a Sewer Easement to include a strip of land 30 feet in width and 1,095 feet in length that totals about .75 acres. This "easement" is to accommodate an existing 24-inch diameter sewer pipeline, which transports the raw sewage to the treatment facility. The easement is adjacent and northeast of the lease area. Regulations at Title 43, Code of Federal Regulations §2740.0-6(d), which pertain to R&PP Act actions, state, "uses which can be more appropriately authorized under other existing authorities shall not be authorized under this act." Parcel #2, which is for a sewer line, meets the criteria to be authorized as a right-of-way under the authority of Section 501 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976. Therefore, the portion of the sewer line outside of the treatment plant lease boundary should be issued as a separate right-of-way for regulatory compliance.

Also housed within the lease area are tower facilities and telemetry/communications equipment for an AWWU controlled Supervisor Control and Data Acquisition (SCADA) system for remote monitoring and control. These facilities are currently being reconfigured as part of a program upgrade. The upgrade requires the installation of an 80-foot monopole communications tower. AWWU plans to install microwave equipment on the new monopole as part of the upgrade. The contractor who installs the pole will use a rubber tired backhoe to dig the hole. A foundation for holding the pole will be poured, using a commercially available cement truck. The tower will be lifted into place with a rubber tired crane. The disturbed area will be raked and reseeded during the following spring.

B. No Action Alternative:

The No Action Alternative would be to deny the lease renewal. Under this alternative AWWU would be required to remove their structures from the land and rehabilitate the site.

### III. AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

#### A. Critical Elements:

The following critical elements of the human environment have been analyzed and are either not present or will not be affected by the Proposed Action or the No Action Alternative.

- Air Quality
- Areas of Critical Environmental Concern
- Cultural Resources/Paleontology
- Environmental Justice
- Farmlands (Prime or Unique)
- Flood plains
- Invasive Non-Native Species
- Native American Religious Concerns
- Subsistence
- Threatened and Endangered Species
- Wastes (Hazardous/Solid)
- Water Quality (Surface/Ground)
- Wetlands/Riparian Zones
- Wild and Scenic Rivers
- Wilderness

#### 1. ANILCA Section 810 Clearance:

The Proposed Action and Alternative have been analyzed and determined to have no effect on any subsistence uses or needs under Section 810. The lands are withdrawn by Executive Order 8102 for a military reservation.

#### 2. Cultural Resources:

The first archaeological evidence of people living in the Cook Inlet area occurs approximately 7000 to 9000 years ago. The people inhabiting the Anchorage area at the time of first recorded history were Tanaina. No Tanaina villages are known for Fort Richardson. The area encompassing Fort Richardson was undoubtedly used by the Tanaina for subsistence activities, especially the coastline and the salmon streams.

Beginning in the 1890's, Non-Native settlement of the general area was stimulated by the search for gold. In 1915, the Alaska Railroad reached Ship Creek and the town of Anchorage was platted. Some homesteads were situated within the area of Fort Richardson, but were acquired by the military when the land was withdrawn from public entry in 1939.

No cultural resources are known for the area of this project. Given the previous disturbance in the area of the project, no previously unknown cultural resources are expected for the area of potential effect.

3. Threatened and Endangered (T&E) Species Clearance:

The Proposed Action and Alternative were evaluated in accordance with the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended. The Proposed Action and Alternative were determined to have no effect on threatened and endangered plants and animals and their habitats. No consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USF&WS) is necessary pursuant to Section 7 of the Act.

B. Land Status:

This land is under a withdrawal for a military reservation. BLM's role is to manage the vegetative and mineral resources. BLM issues land authorizations for this withdrawal, subject to the concurrence of the military.

C. Vegetation:

The project area is within the Cook Inlet/Susitna Lowlands major land resource area. Vegetation in and around the project area has a history of disturbance from military operations. Climax vegetation would consist of paper birch, white spruce and cottonwoods, interspersed with thick patches of alder and willow brush.

D. Recreation:

The area of this project has limited recreation value as the land surrounding the lease area is reserved for military purposes. Access to Fort Richardson Military Reservation is restricted just past the entrance to the ERWTF. AWWU has also fenced in the leased area where the ERWTF is located.

E. Wildlife:

The area surrounding the lease area of the Proposed Action supports a variety of animal species. Resident populations include moose, porcupine, snowshoe hare, microtine rodents and at least 40 species of resident and migrant land birds. Non-resident species that have been seen include fox, coyote, wolf, lynx, brown bear and black bear. Since much of the area has been cleared and fenced, movement of wildlife through the area is hindered. Many migrant birds pass through the area during spring and fall migration, including several raptor and many neo-tropical species.

#### IV. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

##### A. Impacts of the Proposed Action:

###### 1. Vegetation:

No new clearing of land is requested under the Proposed Action. The only new construction will be the 80-foot monopole communications tower, which will be located on land that has been cleared in the past and seeded as a grass lawn. The tower will be located about 90 feet from the northeast corner of the administrative building, in the middle of a lawn area which continues for about 90 more feet before a wooded area begins. The disturbed lawn will be reseeded in the spring after construction.

###### 2. Visual Resources:

There are no additional visual impacts associated with the existing structures within the leasehold. The site where the monopole communications tower will be located is a lawn area near the administrative building. By adding this tower near an already developed facility, the visual impact will be minimal.

###### 3. Wildlife:

Wildlife use of the area is restricted because a security fence surrounds the leased property. A result of rehabilitation may be the removal of some fence sections in certain areas that are currently fenced. If fencing is removed, moose and other wildlife may move through the area with less restriction. The site where the monopole communications tower will be located is currently a lawn area, and therefore wildlife will not be impacted by its construction.

###### 4. Socioeconomic:

The ERWTF is operating at 56 percent of design capacity. AWWU projects that at current rates of population increase in the communities of Eagle River and Chugiak, expansion of existing sewage treatment facilities will not be needed until 2010. By allowing AWWU to operate and maintain the ERWTF, the communities of Eagle River and Chugiak are assured of adequate sewage treatment in the near future. As rate payers, they also do not have to pay the costs of AWWU building new facilities for at least eight years.

##### B. Impacts of the No Action Alternative:

Under the No Action Alternative, AWWU will be required to remove all facilities, an existing sewer pipeline, an existing water pipeline, and rehabilitate the land.

###### 1. Vegetation:

As a result of removal of all structures and improvements on the land, all areas would be reseeded with native grass species to prevent erosion. Over time additional vegetation would establish itself, which would result in climax

vegetation that would consist of paper birch, white spruce and cottonwoods, interspersed with thick patches of alder and willow brush.

2. Visual Resources:  
As the area returns to a natural condition the casual observer may find the area more visually pleasing than in its current state.
  3. Wildlife:  
Removal of fencing and lack of daily traffic into the area would result in increased use of the area by wildlife. Forage and cover would increase over time and result in improved habitat.
  4. Socioeconomic Impacts.  
Under the No Action Alternative, AWWU would be required to remove all structures, portions of two pipelines located within the lease boundary, and rehabilitate the land. The cost for total rehabilitation of the site is unknown. AWWU would need to find a new site to locate a new wastewater treatment facility. AWWU has estimated that costs to build a new facility could run as high as 50 million dollars, with significant additional costs being passed onto rate payers.
- C. Cumulative Impacts:  
The Proposed Action will support the pace of development that is taking place in the Eagle River and Chugiak Area. The Anchorage Bowl Comprehensive Plan (Anchorage 2020) foresees that these communities may grow by at least 66 percent within twenty years. Because of the location, existing screening at the site, and size of the lease area, the impacts on the surrounding communities are minimal.
- D. Residual Impacts  
Residual impacts would be the continuation of a long-term loss of vegetation and wildlife habitat where existing buildings and improvements are located.
- V. CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION:
- A. Individuals and Agencies Consulted  
Bill Quirk, Directorate of Public Works, USARAK  
Olaf Thorsen, Directorate of Public Works, USARAK  
Mike Rutherford, General Foreman, ERWTF  
Damien Stella, Project Contractor for AWWU
  - B. List of Preparers:  
Debbie Blank, Botanist  
Jeff Denton, Wildlife Biologist



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